

I. Introduction

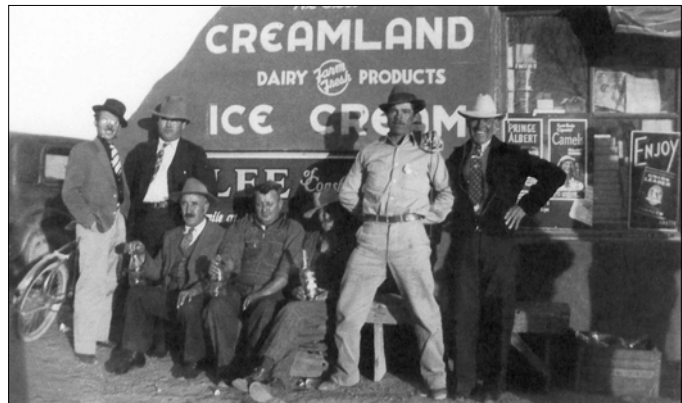
The Isleta corridor is a place of contrasts. Generally speaking, Isleta Boulevard extends from Bridge Boulevard on the north to Isleta Pueblo on the south, a stretch of just over seven miles containing both farms and shopping centers, homes and businesses, neon and adobe. While the corridor is united in its history and its uniqueness, these places of contrast serve local residents as destinations, as reminders of history, and as places of future opportunity.

The Isleta Boulevard and Village Centers Sector Development Plan honors the history of this community and its resolute desire to be distinctive. The sector plan offers four new zones meant to preserve and enhance the corridor's unique character: the Isleta Boulevard Agricultural Zone, the Isleta Boulevard Mixed-Use Zone, the Isleta Boulevard Village Center Zone, and the Isleta Boulevard Design Overlay Zone.

The sector planning process for the Isleta corridor was initiated because this is *a place that matters*; residents know that better than anyone. Values of pride, people, and place are evident all along the corridor: in conversations in front of Jerry's Market, in old-time stories passed down through generations, and at local celebrations like South Valley Pride Day. South Valley residents rally around Isleta Boulevard because it's more than just a road; it's the economic and social heartbeat of their community.

Through its history as a trade route, a small business corridor, and an agricultural crossroads, Isleta Boulevard has always been a corridor brimming with vibrancy. Today, much of that vibrancy is threatened due to booming regional growth, development pressures, and a loss of the area's agricultural viability. The sector plan seeks to build upon the historic, cultural, and economic significance of Isleta Boulevard with planning strategies that protect and enhance what makes the corridor such a special place.

In planning for the future, the Isleta Boulevard and Village Centers Sector Development Plan celebrates the rich history of this corridor and the people who've made it home.



Isleta Boulevard as Gathering Place:
Above: Page's Grocery, Early 20th Century
Below: Corral Tire Shop, Early 21st Century



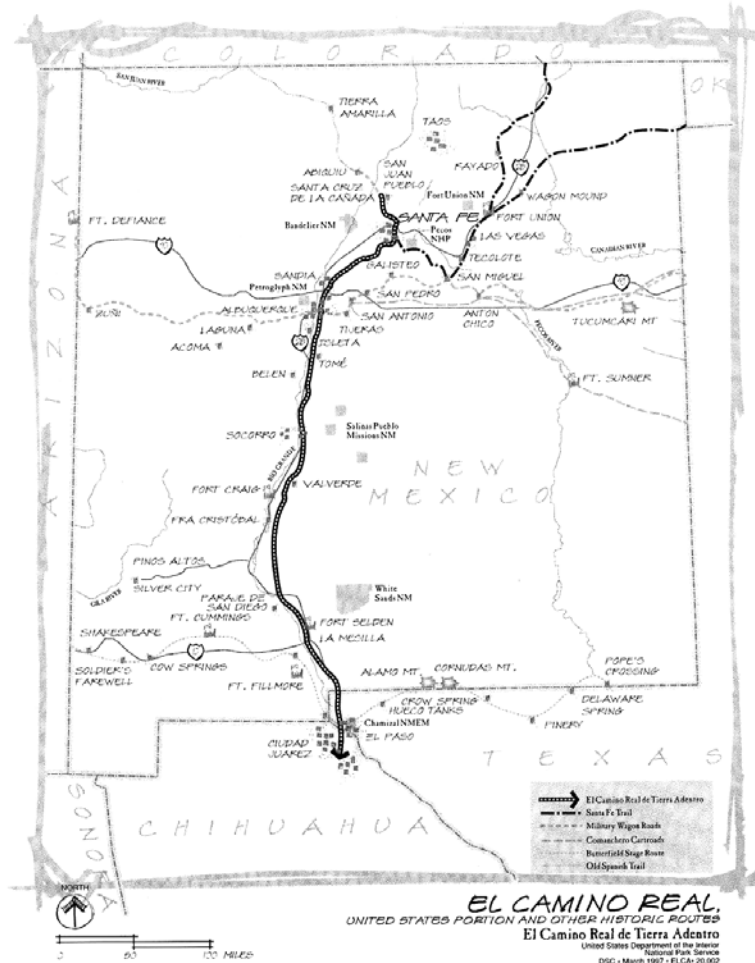
A. HISTORY OF ISLETA BOULEVARD

A drive down Isleta Boulevard today reveals to us how the roadway has been used throughout its history - from family-owned farmland worked for generations, to the Old Armijo School and the new TVI campus, to the lively restaurants and businesses that add energy to the corridor. This variety of historical uses creates a unique visual landscape along Isleta Boulevard that is like no other place, resulting in a unique mix of old and new, urban and rural, residential and commercial.

Isleta Boulevard's origins are as a trade route for indigenous peoples and Spanish explorers. Originally, the road linked great indigenous civilizations with regional trade centers in northern Chihuahua and pueblo settlements along the Rio Grande. Once known as the Chihuahua Trail, the route was renamed El Camino Real when the Spanish arrived in 1540. Traders traveled the route to reach the Southern markets of Mexico. At this time, the roadway provided spaces and opportunities for social interaction and a vital connection between the frontier and New Spain.

During the time of Spanish settlement in what is now New Mexico, the roadway connected the Hispano villages established close to and along the roadway. These Land Grant communities were attracted to the area because of the proximity to the Rio Grande and the fertile nature of the Valley floodplain. Although some accounts give an earlier founding date for the Atrisco Land Grant, the official date is 1692, followed by the founding of Pajarito (1699) and Los Padillas (1705). With the establishment of the Santa Fe Trail in 1821, trade further developed along the roadway, as Anglo-Americans established economic ties to Mexico as well.

"By 1750, the South Valley had become a thriving economic center. The river valley was used for raising crops and the mesa slopes provided grazing land for cattle and sheep. Over the years, the farming land was divided among family members into long narrow strips (varas) with access to the acequia. As families grew and new settlers moved into the area, distinct clusters of houses took shape. These plazas or small communities, each with a church as its social and religious center, were usually named for the most prominent families...celebration of religious and social events and



*the participation of residents in the community promoted cultural identity and fostered solidarity.”
(Shurlock, 1988)*

A relatively self-sufficient lifestyle continued for approximately 150 years along Isleta Boulevard, as Pajarito and Los Padillas (located in the southern part of Isleta Boulevard) relied on services and supplies from Atrisco (located near Northern Isleta Boulevard).

Change came in 1848 when New Mexico was established as a U.S. Territory. The arrival of the railroad and the building of Barelás Bridge in the 1890s further hastened change in the area. Using the railroad, South Valley farmers could export sheep and cattle around the region. During this time, the historic village centers grew as more services were needed. A shift occurred in the South Valley when the railroad brought new job opportunities in Albuquerque, as the area’s singular agricultural economy transitioned into a more varied economy.



Going to market, late 1800s

The first automobiles came to New Mexico in the early 1900s, prompting the Territorial Legislature to recognize the need for public roads. They authorized funds to cut and grade the roadway and designated it as Route 1. By 1915, Route 1 was designated State Road 1 as New Mexico entered the U.S as a State. State Road 1 was surfaced with gravel and considered to be the most important road in New Mexico at the time.



Barelás Bridge, 1920s

In 1926, State Road 1 was renamed U.S. Highway 85, which later became U.S. Route 66, part of the new U.S. Transcontinental Highway. This brought a massive increase of use along Isleta Boulevard, as well as an increase of new building types built around the car, like motels, roadside cafes, and auto-related businesses. In the 1940s, Isleta Boulevard was a hub of economic activity, hosting a variety of uses.



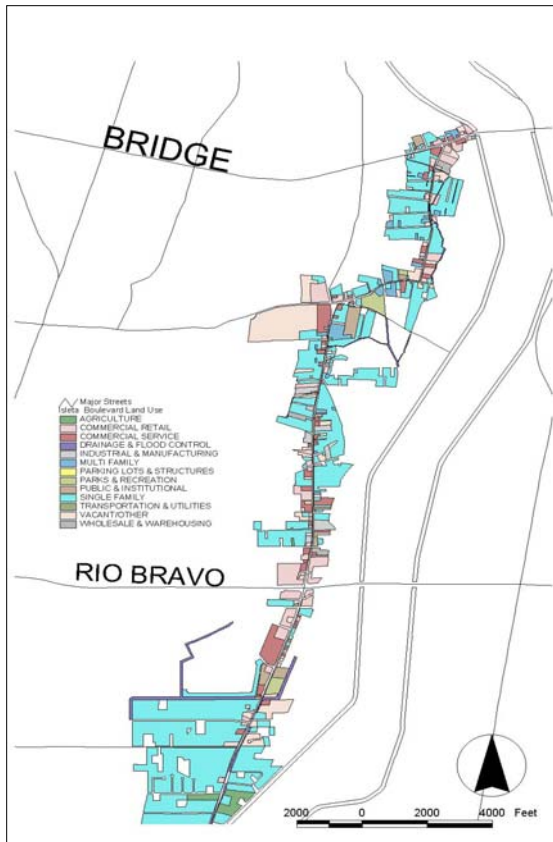
Rt. 66 Auto Camp, date unknown

Eventually U.S. Route 66 was straightened and ‘moved’ to Central and the route was named Isleta Road, later changed to Isleta Boulevard in 1951. During the 1950s, Albuquerque’s population increase caused much of the agricultural land to be converted to residential use. Along the roadway, an increase of businesses to serve roadway-based residents was seen, and agricultural use directly along Isleta declined as competition from large-scale agribusiness in other areas weakened the South Valley’s agricultural base. For the first time, residents began to work away from the community. Still, many of the businesses were locally owned in the South Valley throughout the 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s, chains, branch stores, and restaurants became more common on Isleta Boulevard and local agriculture continued to decline.

B. CURRENT CONDITIONS

Today, Isleta Boulevard is primarily a two-lane road that parallels the meandering Rio Grande for 7.3 miles between Bridge Boulevard and the Isleta Pueblo. The need for an Isleta Boulevard sector plan stems from Westside growth and traffic congestion, the loss of open space, the decline of farming, the loss of rural character, and the need for economic development.

Land uses vary along the corridor from north to south, which suggest distinct character zones along Isleta Boulevard. In the northern portion of the corridor, lots are smaller and tend to be commercial in use. After the heavily commercial intersection of Isleta and Rio Bravo, the land use along Isleta becomes markedly different with larger lot sizes and agricultural uses.



Northern portion of Isleta Boulevard contains smaller parcels with more commercial use



Southern portion of Isleta Boulevard contains larger parcels and more open space

Westside Growth and Traffic Congestion

Area residents often describe their community as being caught in the path of Westside growth. According to the U. S. Census, Albuquerque saw a 21% rise in population from 1990-2000 alone. Much of this growth has taken place on the Westside of the city, where land that until relatively recently was open space is today bursting at its seams with residential subdivisions and shopping centers, mainly because this land is cheaper than east of the river. The considerable housing/job mismatch on the Westside greatly exacerbates traffic problems. With significantly more homes than schools, roads, and jobs, the 2000 Census saw a 69% increase in Bernalillo County drivers commuting 30 minutes or more to work since 1990.

Development geared toward commuters does a disservice to local residents and does not reflect the history or character of the community

Because Isleta Boulevard is one of only two major north-south roadways serving the residents living west of the Rio Grande, Westside growth carries serious implications for development patterns on the Valley floor. Recent land use changes along Isleta Boulevard also reflect a catering toward a commuter driver with a focus on speed and efficiency rather than quality and uniqueness. Along Isleta Boulevard (particularly near the Rio Bravo interchange), we see a place where the automobile rules in a sea of franchise drive-thru restaurants and strip malls and where development standards favor corporate recognition rather than the South Valley's historic character. For longtime South Valley residents who've grown up in this unique community, seeing their surroundings turned into strip malls with suburban influences is disheartening. There is an immediate need to protect the remaining character of the Isleta corridor and to invest in future development that will enhance the community's uniqueness, rather than detract from it.

What's the worst thing that could happen to Isleta Boulevard?*

- It'll be a thoroughfare, not a destination
- Full of chain stores that people ignore
- Housing development on current farmland
- Dwindling open space and farmland
- 5-lane commercial "Anywhere USA"
- Loss of agriculture
- Too much modernization at the risk of losing the cultural/historic buildings
- Lack of vision and planning
- A highway with too much economic development
- Over-development
- Loss of open space and agriculture
- Uncontrolled high-density development
- Big-box retail

*Resident responses from a survey administered during the 9/21/04 public meeting

Loss of Open Space and Decline of Farming

The population growth all around the South Valley and the decline of local farming has caused a squeeze on local agricultural land. Whereas the Valley used to be known for large open space and farming areas, the economics of population growth have caused much of these larger lots to be sub-divided for housing. Given the local minimum lot size of one acre and landowners' monetary interests in developing as many homes as possible on their land, subdividing in the South Valley has the impact of turning this historic semi-rural community into a suburban-style neighborhood with land use patterns that scream "Anywhere, USA."

In meeting after meeting, area residents expressed the need for comprehensive planning strategies that

In a recent survey* of South Valley residents, 78% said agricultural land and the Valley's semi-rural character should be protected

*RCRP Community Assessment, 2000

speak both to farmers' needs and to the development pressures exerted upon their land. This sector plan speaks to those needs in the Isleta corridor, but a larger county-wide strategy is crucial in order to help protect agricultural land throughout the South Valley.

Loss of Semi-Rural Character

As local land is converted from agricultural uses to residential and commercial uses, more is at stake than a simple economic transition. In the South Valley, agriculture is more than how some residents make a living; it is expressed in the essence of the place. In public processes like the Southwest Area Plan and the Bridge Isleta Revitalization Plan, South Valley residents state overwhelmingly that despite current trends, they desire to maintain the semi-rural character of their community. In a survey conducted by RCRP in 2000, 78% of residents expressed their desire to maintain agricultural land and the area's semi-rural quality of life. Yet gradual urbanization is dangerously close to destroying what remains of the Valley's unique character. With piecemeal, unplanned, sprawling development happening at a fast past, the line between urban and rural is vanishing and a suburban, "anywhere" character is taking hold along the corridor. As more parking lots are paved, more bright signs erected, and more big-box stores opened, the rural character of the Valley inches closer to being gone forever. Area residents have stated overwhelmingly – through the sector plan planning process and others – that preventing the loss of rural character is one of the Isleta corridor's most pressing needs. Residents express a crucial need to respond to the threats of vanishing character with a plan that "has teeth."

Residents' biggest fear? That the corridor's unique, semi-rural character will be destroyed in favor of an "Anywhere USA" look and feel

Need for Economic Development

Over time, the South Valley has seen a transition from most of the community making their living on nearby farms to most of the community driving to Albuquerque for work each day. The loss of agriculture eliminated many local jobs that have sustained the Isleta corridor economy for centuries. As such, residents state that the lack of job opportunities in the Valley is a major challenge to its overall health. Given the rich history of agriculture and small business in the community, this is an especially significant transformation. Luckily, the Isleta corridor is home to a new small business incubator that stands to make a big difference

**In 20 years, I'd like to see:
"A bustling and diversified locally-run business district."**

-Resident response from a survey administered during the 9/21/04 public meeting

in jump-starting local entrepreneurship. Especially promising is the incubator's commercial kitchen, which could be a major player in the production of local value-added agricultural products. Residents state that building on these opportunities is crucial, as is the need for a continued focus on the economic needs of local residents and some organizing work among small business owners.

In summary, the pressures of Westside growth and traffic congestion, loss of open space and decline of farming, loss of rural character, and the need for economic development all play a role in some of the troubling conditions along the Isleta corridor that contribute to the need for a sector plan. The next section detail the boundaries for this sector plan.

C. SECTOR PLAN BOUNDARIES

The Boundaries of the Isleta Boulevard and Village Centers Sector Development Plan include all of the parcels facing Isleta Boulevard between Bridge Boulevard and Isleta Pueblo and the designated Village Centers (*See Map.1 on following page*).

These Village Center Boundaries include (*See Map.2 on following pages*):

Gateway Village Center: Includes parcels from those bordering Bridge to the north, the Riverside Drain on the east, Hartline Road to the west, and Waldie Road to the south (*See Map.2..A*).

Armijo Village Center: Includes the Old Armijo School, the AMAFCA drainage site, Armijo Park, and nearby parcels fronting Isleta (*See Map.2..B*).

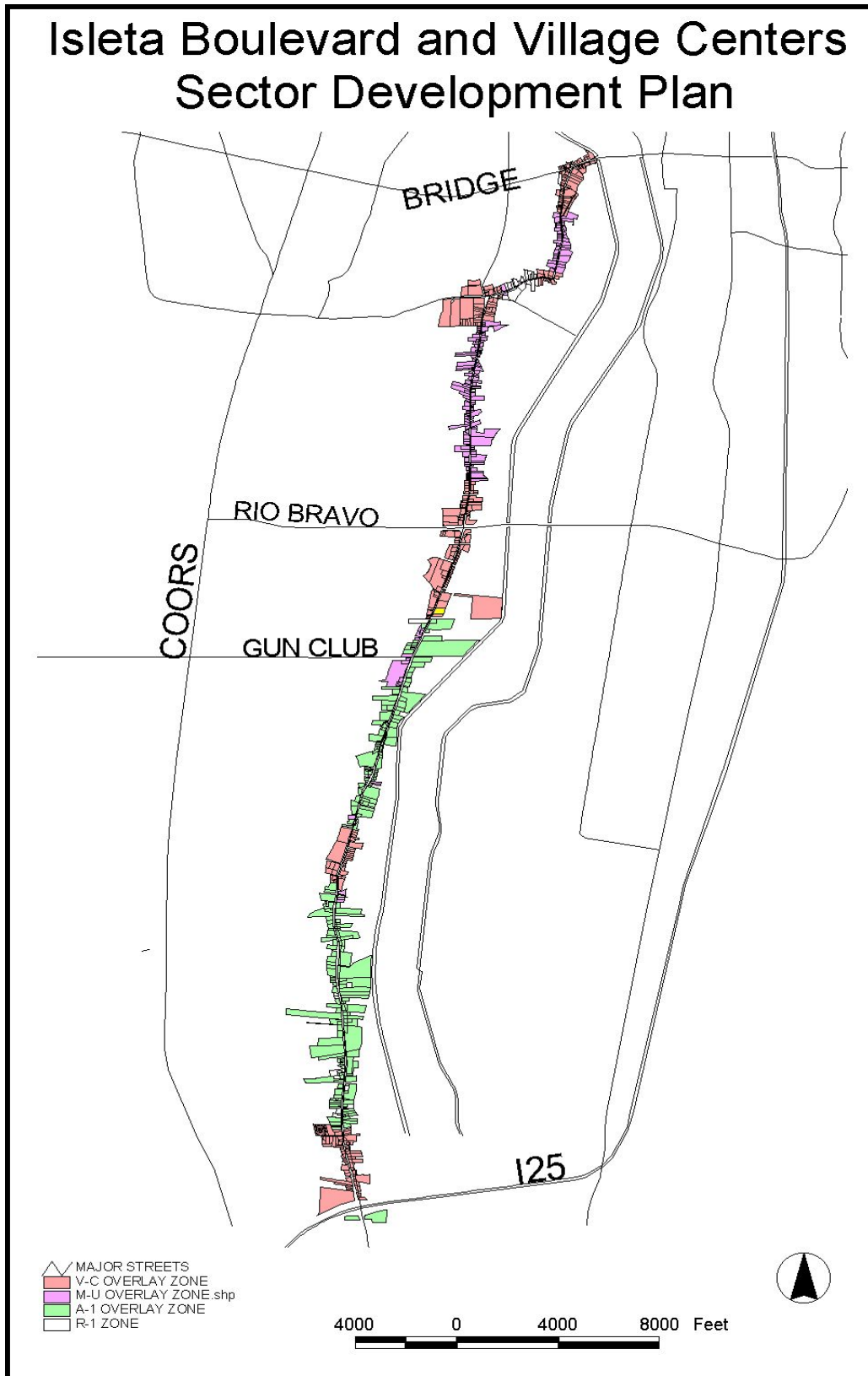
Arenal Village Center: Includes parcels fronting the intersection of Isleta, Goff, and Arenal in addition to the agricultural land west to the Beckham Lateral (*See Map.2..C*).

Rio Bravo Commercial Center: Includes Isleta-fronting parcels south of Bonaguidi to the Pajarito Lateral (*See Map.2..D*).

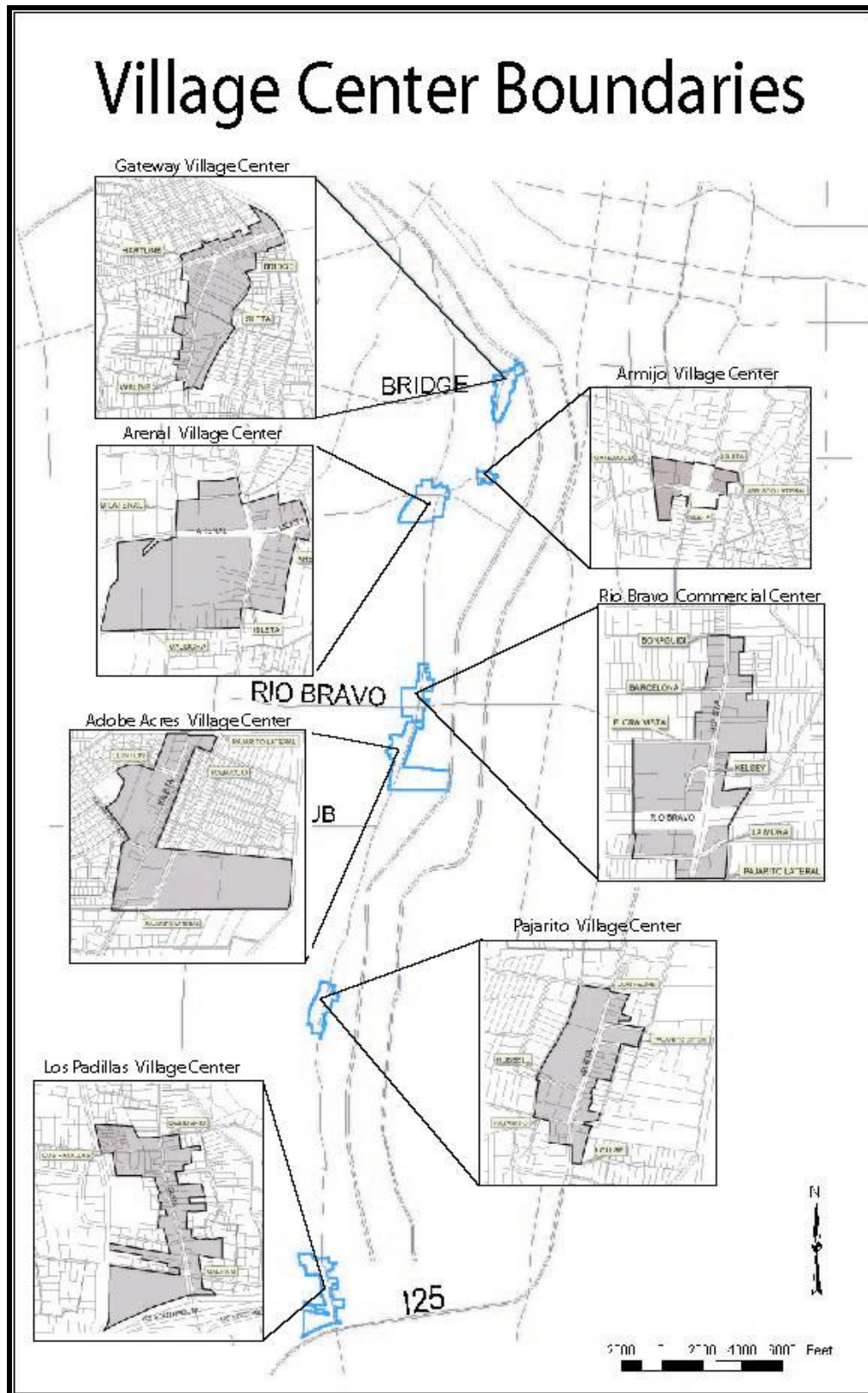
Adobe Acres Village Center: Includes parcels fronting Isleta from the Pajarito Lateral on the north to Los Padillas drain to the south (*See Map.2..E*).

Pajarito Village Center: Fronting parcels on Isleta from Don Felipe on the north to Louise Ave. on the South (*See Map.2..F*).

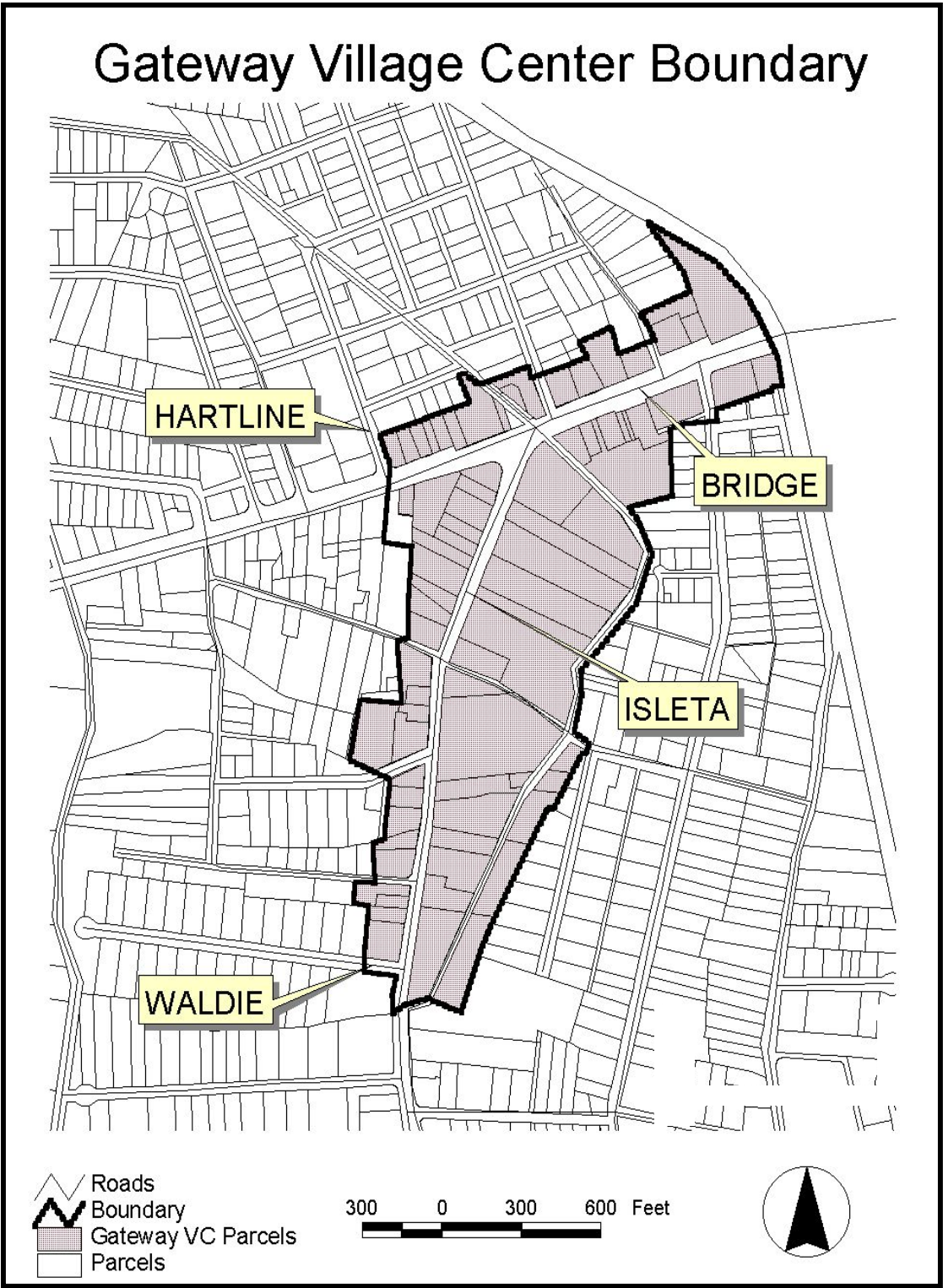
Los Padillas Village Center: Fronting parcels on Isleta from Desiderio on the north to I-25 on the South (*See Map.2..G*).



Map. 1



Map.2



Map 2.A

